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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SUVA 000075

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TAGS: [ASEC](#) [PREL](#) [CASC](#) [MARR](#) [FJ](#)

SUBJECT: FIJI POLICE FIGHT TO RETAIN INDEPENDENCE FROM
MILITARY; HAVE EYEWITNESS TO RFMF MURDER OF CIVILIAN

REF: 06 SUVA 586

Classified By: Charge Ted Mann, per 1.5 (B) and (D)
D)

¶1. (C) Summary: RSO met with the Fiji Police Assistant Commissioner for Police Operations Samuela Matakibau January 23 to discuss the current state of the Fiji police and its relationship with the military-appointed interim government. Despite the military's assertions that the police and army are working together, Matakibau said the police are not coordinating operations with the military. The police, he insisted, will investigate any military abuses that are reported to them. Matakibau told RSO a policeman witnessed the killing of a villager by RFMF officers in early January. The policeman and his family have been moved to a safe location for their protection. The police plan to arrest the perpetrators, he said. A few days after the meeting with the RSO, Matakibau was picked up by the military and detained at the military barracks. He has not yet been released.

Assistant Police Commissioner Says Police are Not
Coordinating Operations with RFMF

¶2. (C) RSO met with the Fiji Police Assistant Commissioner for Operations Samuela Matakibau January 23. Matakibau is the operational commander for all uniformed police in Fiji, directly supervises 78% of the Fiji Police force, and controls the now disarmed Police Tactical Response Team (PTR). Matakibau said there is still little communication at the upper management level between the military and the police. Only the military-appointed Police Commissioner, Jim Koroi, attends meetings with the RFMF Commander and senior army officers. Police senior staff often feel out of the loop and learn about new police and military & joint operations from the news and the military's press conferences. Matakibau strongly emphasized that the police were not coordinating their operations with the military, despite the military's public claims to the contrary. When asked about the presence of uniformed police officers at the military roadblocks with the soldiers, he stated that the police are only directing traffic and enforcing traffic laws. This operation was ordered by Commissioner Koroi.

¶3. (C) Matakibau said he talks about once a week with former Deputy Commissioner Moses Driver, who now resides in Australia. He has also spoken with former Commissioner Andrew Hughes three times since the coup. According to Matakibau, Hughes and Driver have advised that he and acting Assistant Commissioner for Crime Joe Rasiga should make every effort ensure the police stay as independent as possible. Hughes and Driver believe that other senior officers have

been edging a little too close to the interim government.
(Comment: This statement may be a bit self-serving, but from what the RSO knows of the players it sounds plausible. End comment.)

Military involvement in Law Enforcement Remains a Problem

¶4. (C) Matakibau said he has expressed his frustration to Commissioner Koroi about the military's frequent interventions in law enforcement matters. To illustrate his point, Matakibau said that recently a van at a checkpoint in Lami (a Suva suburb), was searched by soldiers and a large bag of marijuana was found inside. Instead of turning the occupants over to the police, the military took them up to the barracks and assaulted them. They then returned the occupants to the Lami checkpoint without their van. The men were never charged with any crime. Matakibau also noted that military raids on hotels and other establishments to crack down on liquor violations are not being coordinated with the police as claimed by the military.

¶5. (C) Lack of cooperation has led, at times, to friction. A uniformed Fiji Police Senior Inspector was seized by the military while he was inspecting checkpoints for his daily report, noting which police and military personnel were manning checkpoints. The military apparently took exception to this and took him up to the barracks. They tried to make him do push-ups and run, but he refused and dared them to assault him. They backed down and let him leave unharmed.

Police Have Eyewitness in Verebasaga Death

¶6. (C) Matakibau said a police officer was an eye-witness to

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the beating death of Nimilote Verebasaga in military custody on January 5. Matakibau has taken the officer off the street and assigned him to administrative duties at police HQ. The officers, family has been moved onto a police installation for their protection. According to this officer, three military officers were involved in the beating. They made the victim crawl between two officers who then kicked him as he moved by (this was repeated several times). A third officer kicked the victim in the head. The initial police investigation has determined that Verebasaga had not been in any fights or incidents before he was taken into military custody, as had been claimed by the military. Matakibau pointed out the man was a 7th day Adventist and did not use alcohol or grog.

¶7. (C) When RSO asked if he believed the military would allow the arrest of the officers responsible for the death, Matakibau said the Commissioner told him that Bainimarama has given the order for the officers to surrender themselves. If the officers do not surrender by the end of January, the police have the green light to arrest them. (Comment: Whether the military will actually allow the police to arrest the suspects is an open question. End comment.)

Bainimarama Out to Stop Abuses?

¶8. (C) According to Matakibau, sources in the military, Bainimarama has stated that he will not tolerate continued abuses against people not directly acting against the government. According to these sources, officers will be held responsible for what their enlisted soldiers do. Military lawyers are allegedly telling the officers that at some point in the future the military will be required to pay out millions of dollars in civil suits for rights violations. (Comment: We hope Matakibau, sources are right. However, some of Bainimarama, recent statements appear to encourage continued abuses against dissidents. On a &talk-back8 TV program January 27, Bainimarama said that NGO representatives who speak against the military will be brought to the military barracks and &taken to task.8 End comment.)

New Commissioner Soon On the Job

¶9. (C) New Police Commissioner Romanu Tikotikoca is expected to start work on January 31. Every police officer the RSO has spoken with believes this will be a change for the better. Matakibau stated that senior officers have told him that when Tikotikoca comes on he must try as hard as possible to re-establish the independence of the police. Since the new Commissioner is a former senior policeman, with no previous ties to the Military, there is room for some hope, he said.

Matakibau Detained

¶10. (C) Matakibau was taken to the military barracks on January 28th, reportedly on suspicion of concealing weapons from the military. The RFMF spokesman later said that no weapons were found. As of this date (1/30), Matakibau remains in military custody.

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